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SUBJECT: UNHCHR TO AMBASSADOR: NGOS AND URIBE ARE OCEANS APART

REF: BOGOTA 3231

CLASSIFIED BY: William R. Brownfield, Ambassador; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights Kyung-wha Kang shared her concerns with the Ambassador on December 2 about the growing distance between the Colombian Government and NGOs on their perception of the human rights situation. She attributed the discord in part to the ongoing dispute between President Uribe and the Supreme Court. Kang stressed UNHCHR's continuous "middle man" role would be critical to helping Uribe and the NGO community reach common ground. To that end, Deputy High Commissioner Kang told the Ambassador that UNHCHR had signed an agreement with the GOC to monitor the military's application of its human rights policies (reftel). Regarding its role in helping revamp Colombia's intelligence agency, Kang cautioned that UNHCHR lacked the expertise and resources but would facilitate the visit of a Colombian delegation to Germany to glean insight on the German experience with purging the Stasi's intelligence files. End Summary.

NGOS AND GOVERNMENT AT ODDS

12. (C) United Nations High Commission for Human Rights (UNHCHR) Deputy High Commissioner Kang told the Ambassador that the political rhetoric on human rights continues to worsen, with the Colombian government reporting improvements and NGOs bemoaning GOC abuses. Kang said she had noted increased anxiety among NGOs over President Uribe's ongoing battle with the Supreme Court, which has yet to select a new Prosecutor General (Fiscal General). While recognizing the government's significant advances in addressing human rights, Kang said that the UNHCHR mission in Colombia was very protective of its credibility with both the government and the NGO community and would continue taking painstaking efforts to not take sides. The Ambassador commented that human rights groups have personalized the debate around President Uribe and his potential re-election based on the perhaps incorrect assumption that a new president would be more sympathetic and responsive to their grievances. The Uribe government, meanwhile, simplistically lumps most of the human rights NGO's into the category of FARC sympathizers.

DAS SCANDAL DOESN'T HELP TO BRIDGE THE GAP...

13. (C) Both Deputy High Commissioner Kang and the Ambassador agreed that the wiretapping by the Administrative Department of Security (DAS) and other GOC institutions of judges' conversations provided unfortunate fodder for the human rights community to suspect the executive branch of meddling with the judiciary. Kang reported that the UNHCHR was re-thinking its proposal to help the DAS purge Colombian intelligence files of inappropriate information about UN officials and, subsequently, NGOs, political opponents, and the courts. She said the DAS Director Felipe Munoz' premature announcement of such an agreement had startled Geneva, which is being highly protective of its credibility as it wades into this complex issue. Kang said the UNHCHR was considering asking for assistance from other governments with expertise in intelligence. In any event, the UNHCHR plans to take a GOC delegation to Germany to learn about purging intelligence files of the East German Ministry for State Security (Stasi) during reunification. The Ambassador emphasized the international community's obligation to help Colombia sort out what happened in the DAS scandal and to avoid a repeat.

...BUT POLITICAL WILL ON MILITARY MONITORING PROJECT

14. (C) Deputy High Commissioner Kang reported a breakthrough with the Defense Minister, Interior Minister, Armed Forces Commander and the Procurador, who all agreed to UNHCHR's proposal to monitor seven of the military's fifteen measures passed in the wake of the Soacha extrajudicial executions case. Kang cited the agreement as proof that the GOC has the political will to address human rights problems, and the Ambassador added that the international community should capitalize on this opportunity with the Uribe administration. The Ambassador noted that the GOC seemed most open to projects such that do not take predetermined positions, focus on feasible solutions, and encourage a non-confrontational approach.

BROWNFIELD